DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 420 059 CS 216 346

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TITLE Addressing Teachers' Concerns about Diversity in Composition Classrooms.
PUB DATE 1998-04-02
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Communication and Composition (Chicago, IL, April 1-4, 1998).
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Environment; Classroom Techniques; Culture Conflict; *Diversity (Student); English Instruction; Ethnic Relations; Higher Education; Language Usage; *Professional Training; Social Integration; *Teaching Assistants; *Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS *Arizona State University; Hate Speech; *Offensive Speech

ABSTRACT

First-year teaching assistants (TAs) at Arizona State University participate in a fair amount of training--in rhetorical theory, composition theory, teaching theory and practices, the English 101 syllabus, and university policies and services. But one classroom incident which began with a TA resulted in much turmoil on campus. Two examples of materials with hostile and offensive language aimed at persons from underrepresented groups transmitted over the Internet were brought to an English 101 class by a TA because they outraged her. To heighten teachers' awareness of matters of diversity, additional training was offered to all composition teachers. The Intergroup Relations Center (IRC) was established in the summer of 1997. The Composition Program has worked closely with the IRC to raise teachers' awareness of diversity issues and to offer pedagogical strategies for fostering diversity in the classroom. The IRC staff designed an 8-hour series of four workshops for teachers. The workshops focused on: (1) personal and social identities and strategies for encouraging students to respect the diversity of identities that exist in any classroom; (2) academic freedom, free speech, and student conduct; (3) strategies for de-escalating destructive conflict when it inevitably arises in a composition classroom; and (4) specific strategies for generating constructive classroom dialogue when controversial topics are initiated by the teacher or by students. (Appended are seven classroom scenarios for addressing diversity, suggested ground rules for creating dialogue in the classroom, and applications for Rogerian rhetoric.) (CR)

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ED 420 059

Addressing Teachers' Concerns about Diversity in Composition Classrooms
Duane Roen, Arizona State University
Paper presented at CCCC, Chicago, 2 April 1998
Session C1: Teacher Training: Theory and Practice

Let me begin with a brief overview of training for teaching composition at my institution. Our composition program is relatively large--with roughly 145 teachers, 600 sections, and 13,000 students.

First-year TAs at Arizona State University participate in a fair amount of training. In August the three-week, pre-semester orientation introduces approximately thirty TAs--many of them with no previous teaching experience--to rhetorical theory, composition theory, teaching theory and practices, the English 101 syllabus, and university policies and services. During the fall, these first-year TAs enroll in a three-unit teaching practicum in which they study more of the same. In both the August orientation and the fall course, TAs also work through the course assignments before their students do. During the spring semester first-year TAs meet one hour each week with the Director of Composition and the English 102 Course Coordinator as they teach English 102, the second-semester composition course--a course in documented argument. While discussions focus on upcoming and current syllabus matters, there is time each week for discussing other concerns, especially those dealing with classroom dynamics. During the year, first-year TAs' classes are visited by senior teachers in the program. In sum, the training for first-year TAs is more thorough than that offered to any other TAs on campus, but it probably still falls short of being thorough enough.

The training and supervision for second- , third-, fourth- and fifth-year TAs is less thorough. TAs in our basic-writing program--a program in which students

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essentially "stretch" the English 101 course over two semesters--get fairly thorough supervision and guidance from the course coordinator, Greg Glau, who performs Herculean miracles to visit their classes, read their graded essays, and meet with them regularly. For the fifty or so teachers in our 73 computer-mediated sections, we provide on-going training and mentoring on an almost daily basis. For the other experienced teachers, we offer approximately ten hours of workshops before the fall semester begins, one class visit during each semester, course meetings before and during the semester, and on-line discussions of course matters. You can decide for yourselves whether the quantity of our efforts is adequate.

I need to contextualize our teacher training just a little more to get to the focus of this presentation. That is, previous events--instances of hostility aimed at persons from underrepresented groups. On August 25, 1995, a member of Sigma Chi fraternity severely beat an African-American man who remained at the fraternity house after a party. In September of 1995, an African-American employee at Arizona State University found the word "Nigger" painted on her car, which was parked in a campus lot. On Saturday, January 27, 1996, the evening before Superbowl XXX was played at Sun Devil Stadium on the ASU campus. A fight broke out between Pittsburgh Steelers and Dallas Cowboys fans on a Tempe street near the Sigma Chi fraternity house. The fight involved African-America and Euro-American men from on and off campus, including at least two Euro-American fraternity members. Witnesses reported hearing racial epithets before or during the altercation (Tait). As a result of these and other apparently racially motivated incidents over the past few years, African Americans in particular are frustrated and angry about the hostile conditions in which they work and study. Because of these

incidents, an incident on February 6, 1996 became a wind that fanned a previously smoldering fire.

The Narrative: **Tuesday, February 6, 1996**. One of our Teaching Assistants, a second-year M.A. student, distributed to her English 101 (First-Year Composition) class two handouts. One is a four-page list of violent/offensive language directed at African Americans; it is labeled "Writing by Vincent Allen Krause, Organization for the Execution of Minorities, University of Michigan, April 6, 1994. (I have a letter from the University of Michigan, by the way, that says that a hacker used Vincent Krause's computer account to post the offensive material.) The other handout is an equally violent and offensive two-page document labeled "Top 75 reasons why women (bitches) should not have freedom of speech," compiled by "the four players of CORNELL. Evan Camps, Brian Waldman, Rikus Linschoten, and the late-season acquisition, the Deion Sanders of sexism, pat Sicher." Both documents came from Internet sites, which means that they have been widely available to the public. The TA brought the documents to her English 101 class because they outraged her; she wanted students to share that outrage and to be better prepared to address racism and sexism in their speaking and writing. That classroom incident resulted in much turmoil on campus. Further, it caused us to offer additional training to all composition teachers.

As a result of the incident of February 6, 1996, we have done more than in the past to heighten teachers' awareness of matters of diversity. First, Immediately after the incident, we spent six hours over that many weeks in the first-year TA meetings discussing the incident and implications for all teachers of composition. I led some of those sessions, but I also invited to our meetings Charles Calleros, Chair of the Campus

Environment Team; Robert Nolan, visiting professor of English, who has written about diversity in the classroom; and Martin Duncan, a teacher in the Department of Communication.

Second, in August, during the three-week orientation for first-year TAs, all of our new teachers participated in the day-long orientation offered by the Graduate College on August 7, 1996. One of the required sessions focused on diversity in the classroom. Further, I made matters of diversity a thread that that ran throughout the three weeks, as well as the fall practicum, and spring weekly meetings. That is, I have addressed it whenever an opportunity arose, which was almost daily. I wanted this to be a thread rather than a one-shot discussion of the topic. At the end of the orientation, first-year TAs' responses were diverse, with some indicating that we had spent too little time on the subject, others indicating the opposite.

Third, first-year TAs, along with all other teachers in the Department of English (198 in all), participated in the all-day diversity workshops on August 21, 1996, led by Charles Calleros, Joseph Greaves, Michelle Holling, Kevin Quashie, James Riding, Mary Rothschild, Vicki Ruiz, and Scott Sevens--all faculty at Arizona State University. During the day the workshop leaders focused on many questions including the following: How do texts enter the canon? What makes texts controversial? How do we teach the debates that are important to human existence? What is "an American"? How is race been socially constructed? How do we make it possible for students to reveal their subject positions when they discuss controversial topics?

Fourth, we developed a departmental series of brown-bag discussions of diversity. Various members of the department suggested topics for discussion.

Fifth, whenever I have become aware of a diversity concern in any teacher's classroom, I have spoken with that teacher and with any students who might be concerned. Several times I have urged a teacher to change a lesson plan or a unit to make it more sensitive to issues of diversity. For example, one teacher came to me in early August, 1996 to request permission to use a GQ magazine essay on white supremacists (Sager). After reminding the teacher that she needed copyright permission to use the piece, I also noted that the essay contains some of the same language that had created problems in the TA's class on February 6, 1996. I encouraged her to look for other texts that treat the same subject but in a less inflamatory matter. I did not forbid her from using the essay, though. She was angry and later accused me publicly of violating her academic freedom.

On Monday, March 25, 1996 a TA brought to me a draft of students' paper offering solutions to overpopulation. For the most part, the solutions consisted of plans to attack certain parts of the planet with nuclear and germ weapons. After our discussion, the TA was able to convince the student that proposals have to be reasonable and supportable and that the support needs to be present within the essay. Of course, the TA had already discussion these rhetorical criteria with the class, but the student in question apparently had not taken the message seriously. When the student subsequently revised the paper to make it rhetorically effective, he removed the offensive--and rhetorically ineffective--material.

In response to the events that I described earlier, Arizona State University established the Intergroup Relations Center in the summer of 1997. The Composition

Program has worked closely with the IRC to raise teachers' awareness of diversity issues and to offer pedagogical strategies for making fostering diversity in the classroom.

Our first collaboration with the IRC occurred last August 21, when IRC Director, Jesus Trevino, and staff member Kris Ewing, conducted a three-hour workshop with the 145 teachers of composition. Workshop topics included personal and social identities, as well as guidelines for constructive classroom dialogue. In the second part of the workshop, Jesus and Kris asked teachers to discuss classroom scenarios that we had solicited from teachers the previous spring. (Those appear on the handout.)

In the fall of 1997 and again in the spring of 1998, the IRC staff designed for us an eight-hour series of four workshops. The **first** two-hour workshop focused on personal and social identities and strategies for encouraging students to respect the diversity of identities that exist in any classroom.

The **second** workshop focused on academic freedom, free speech, and student conduct. In this session, co-conducted by the IRC Director and the Assistant Dean for Judicial Affairs in the Office of Student Life, teachers explored legal issues and university policy by discussing scenarios in which teacher and/or students made inflamtory comments.

The **third** workshop focused on strategies for de-escalating destructive conflict when it inevitably arises in a composition classroom--when a student says, as one male student recently did in an English 102 classroom that included a member of the women's varsity golf team, "Everyone knows that all LPGA golfers are lesbians; and all lesbians hate men."

The **fourth** workshop built on the third one by focusing on specific strategies for generating constructive classroom dialogue when controversial topics are initiated by the teacher or by students. It is here where I wish to comment briefly on the "ground rules" that appear on third page of the handout. I'd also like to comment on some strategies that composition teachers already employ, especially in courses focusing explictly on persuasion.

As I work with new TAs each year, we spend a fair amount of time discussing strategies for encouraging students to respond to peers' drafts in ways that will help writers revise effectively--that is, to meet the needs of interested readers. We talk about ways to validate what writers generate as they're composing while simultaneously helping them understand when and how they need to revise what they've generated. One gereral strategy it for peers to first indicate what it already clear to them and then follow-up with questions that demonstrate a genuine need for more information. For example, if I were to mention in a draft of an essay that I really liked teaching calves to drink milk when I was a child growing up on a dairy farm in Wisconsin, you might want to know how one teaches a calf to drink and why one might have to do that. You'd be most likely to ask those questions if you had <u>not</u> shared my experience of living and working on a dairy farm. That is, your life experiences have not given you access to that perspective. We hope that students in our writing courses have scores of opportunities to say to peer writers, "I haven't had that experience. Tell me more about what it's like so that I can better understand it."

In courses focusing on more explictly persuasive genres of writing students need to examine their experiences from diverse perspectives. It becomes the responsibility of

every member of the class to say, "Thanks for sharing the personal experience that led you to offer this assertion. Let me offer my own experience here because it differs from yours. Perhaps if we reflect on your experience and mine, as well as on Jane's and John's, we'll all broaden our perspectives. And your argument will become stronger if you say something about experiences that differ from yours."

In a course on persuasive writing we can help keep discussions civil if we make it habit to interrogate all kinds of assertions--those that seem conserative, liberal, or moderate; those that seem logical or illogical; those that seem inclusive or exclusive. By making regularly interrogating all kinds of assertions, students more readily come to accept that any given interrogation is not an ad hominem attack. We're all responsible for offering support for our assertions, not just those asserts that conflict with the teacher's views of how the world operates.

To make these interrogations work well, we can adopt a Rogerian rhetorical approach to topics. Some of the features of such an approach are summarized on the last page of the handout. In general, we work to understand one another's perspective. We also work to find common ground--somewhere between or among our differences. We try not to play a zero-sum game; instead, we try to have everyone gain something--even if it's only a new perspective.

Moving our culture and its institutions and individuals toward "the promise of diversity," as Cross and her coeditors note, is no simple task (Cross, Elsie Y., Judith H. Katz, Frederick A. Miller, Edith W. Seashore, eds. The Promise of Diversity: Over 40 Voices Discuss Strategies for Eliminating Discrimination in Organizations. Burr Ridge, IL: Irwin and NTL Institute, 1994). Any such work that occurs in classrooms will be

marked by difficult moments, but we can decrease the number of such moments by carefully considering the effects of our classroom materials and activities before using them. We need to encourage teachers to be "on a mission" (2) as bell hooks says her teachers were to help students become more critically aware of oppression in any of its many forms. However, the price of awareness should not be emotional distress.

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Classroom Scenarios (Solicited from Composition Teachers at ASU)

Scenario 1

While demonstrating various uses of the World Wide Web in my ENG 101 class, I went to a humorous site entitled "Gummipalooza," a silly assortment of descriptions—favorite kinds of gummie bears, the pitfalls of "imitation" gummie bears, and the like. I found the site visually appealing in ways that demonstrated the integration of graphic images and text and exposed students to such notions as they were to develop in websites of their own. Eventually, I stumbled onto a portion of the site that was perhaps too emphatic in its cynical tone, apparently calling attention to itself in a self-referential satire that was not "working" for myself or for my students. (Nobody was laughing, which they believe to be an indication of the failure of a particular satire, for better or for worse.) I said something about that bit of text, indicating that I realized it was a bit "gay." I used this expression later in the class. Upon noting that something else was "gay," intending to note its negative qualities, a student informed me that this was the third time I'd used the word "gay" to connote poor quality and/or failure in rhetorical terms (this student is admittedly homosexual). At this point, I died. I apologized repeatedly, flailing about for just the right way to erase what I'd said; none was forthcoming. I simply had to admit that my own tendency to use language unproblematically was perhaps injurious to my students and indicative of my apparent biases. Interestingly, as we discussed my faux pas, we came to understand that I was simply calling up a term used pretty much in the eighties; "gay" had been used frequently to connote something outside the norm, something out of style in ways that made it appear "nerdy." I was relieved to see that they understood my usage, however unpleasant it was to know that they found some of my diction dated. The young man who had originally pointed out my mistake was okay with me; we walked back to my office after class and talked generally about the essay he was working on, etc., and I offered apologies here and there until finally he told me to "forget it."

It's a pretty sad tale. I am not proud of it. However, I did learn that despite my degrees and my general self-regard concerning my allegedly careful attention to what I say, it is simply too easy to use language inelegantly; I/we must be vigilant regarding the words we choose (recently, regrettably, this has again become clear).

Scenario 2

I was teaching English 216, Persuasive Writing on Public Issues. At the beginning of the semester, I always tell the students that we are talking about *issues*....that means points of disagreement and possibly controversy. I say that we are allowed to disagree and to discuss, and that we may UNINTENTIONALLY insult or anger each other—and I repeat throughout the semester that it is important to TELL each other if comments or statements are making one (or more) of us uncomfortable. If speaking out in front of the class is too stressful, all students are encouraged and welcome to tell the teacher privately if some comment or string of comments seem offensive.

One day a young Caucasian male student, while we were listing some current controversies and issues on the board for possible exploration in their journals and working drafts, stated that he was opposed to Affirmative Action laws, and that he thought they were unfair and discriminatory against whites. It was one of those moments when my stomach hit my shoes, but I asked him if he had indeed read any of those laws, and had in mind any particular area of public life affected by Affirmative Action that he was interested in exploring.

He replied that no, he had never read any affirmative action laws, but thought that their impact on businesses who bid for government contracts was a negative one. I could see that my two black students were extremely opposed to these comments, and suggested, before discussion opened, that he work closely with the young (black) gentleman sitting directly in front of him, during brainstorm session, and to bounce research ideas around. The other student flashed a knowing look my way, and smiled at the challenge.

Soon, we had listed several more issues on the board, and students paired up to read each other's idea outlines and brainstorm together. As class ended, the two young men, one black, one white, were still earnestly talking, their heads close together, and the black man showing the white one a list of articles he'd used in another class, for a paper on Afro-centric education....

I really don't remember what issues *either* of these young men ended up writing about. I only remember that an in-class friendship grew and they were often seen passing ideas in front of each other, learning from each other, especially the younger (white) man, whose world had grown by an entire culture, only because one young black man was willing to be his mentor. I will always remember the power of one-on-one contact to destroy sweeping racism and injustice because of incidents like these.

Scenario 3

I always feel a little uncomfortable talking about racism and blatant acts of discrimination that concern one particular race when there's only one representative of that race in my classroom. This happens a lot concerning African-Americans: three times over the past two years, I've been in the uncomfortable position of leading a discussion that involved African-American issues when there was only one African-American present. It's happening right now in my WAC class and to make it worse my student is a VERY gentle, soft-spoken young woman who has great ideas—but who is so quiet that we can barely hear her. I always try to be fair and equal and invite all kinds of opinions and input, but my other students often end up kind of turning to that African-American student as a representative, even though I try to steer away from that situation. I'd be interested in strategies to help us out!!

Scenario 4

Students in a writing about literature course are assigned August Wilson's The Piano Lesson. On the first day of discussion, one student—a white woman in her mid forties—announces that she found the play "incredibly offensive," not only because it uses the "N-word," but also because it perpetuates demeaning stereotypes that African-Americans have been fighting against for years. She wants to know why the class has to read such an "awful play" and can't imagine how it ever won a Pulitzer Prize. "Weren't there any other plays that year?" she asks. Another student—an Hispanic woman in her early twenties—says that she liked the play very much and didn't find it offensive in the least. She states as well that all her Black friends love August Wilson and think he's a terrific writer. Not surprisingly, a tense and awkward silence fills the room. What's the poor instructor—a beleaguered white man in his late forties—to do?

Scenario 5

During a whole class discussion of potential paper topics, we came to one position on homosexuals in the military. The person writing the paper was taking the position that the government/military should not be concerned with a person's sexual orientation or sexual activity, therefore it should not even come into question.

A student raised his hand and said, "Yeah, but the military doesn't accept people who have congenital heart problems or flat feet. So why should they accept people who suffer from homosexuality?"

Scenario 6

One of my English 102 students was writing about Ebonics, and in one of the group sessions, some "jokes" were being bandied about that were in actuality racially motivated. Instead of addressing the jokester about inappropriate behavior, I tried to make it advantageous to the work session by commenting that the jokester had provided the writer with some objections, issues, and questions that could be addressed in the paper. We discussed briefly how to handle such responses to the issue of Ebonics in a positive manner. As a result, the situation did not get out of hand, the jokester was given the opportunity to save face and to analyze the responses that were made, as were the other members of the group. Such jokes were, to my knowledge, never repeated in the group again, and the subject of Ebonics was given the serious, respectful attention it deserved rather than turning it into a racially charged issue. At another point, when peers were asked to give written comments, the jokester commented that new information was gained about an issue that the jokester did not realize was so important and had such an impact on education.

Scenario 7

I don't have a particular classroom situation in mind, but I would be interested to know whether and how, at the institutional level, goals related to promoting cultural diversity on campus intersect with retention efforts.

What kinds of information does the university have regarding perceptions students (and faculty) have about diversity issues on campus? For example, is there a widespread perception that the campus community appears to be insensitive to difference(s)? Are efforts to accommodate differences within the campus community underexplored because of lack of awareness or indifference or prejudice?

ASU's Intergroup Relations Center 11/24/97
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Suggested Ground Rules for Creating Dialogue in the Classroom

1. In order to create a climate for open and honest dialogue, it is important for class participants to treat each other with respect. Name calling, accusations, verbal attacks, sarcasm, and other negative exchanges are counter-productive to successful teaching and learning about many topics.

2. The purpose of class discussions is to generate greater understanding about different topics. Thus, questions and comments should be asked or stated in such a way that will promote learning, rather than defensiveness.

> Example of a question that puts students on the defensive:
> "Why do you insist on calling yourself Hispanic? That's wrong. It seems to me that 'Latino' is the correct term. Can you explain to me why you insist on using the term 'Hispanic'?"
>
> Example of a non-defensive question:
> "I don't understand. What is the difference between the terms 'Hispanic' and 'Latino'?"

3. Learning is both about sharing different views and actively listening to those with different views. Students in this class are expected to do both. Learning is maximized when many different viewpoints are expressed in the classroom.

4. Keep the discussion and comments on the topic, not the individual. Don't personalize the dialogue.

5. Remember that it is okay to disagree with each other. Agree to disagree.

6. Everyone is expected to share. Keep in mind that the role of the instructor is to make sure that everyone's voice is heard in class. Thus, the instructor will facilitate the dialogue and insure that all viewpoints are expressed.

Rogerian Rhetoric

"Real communication occurs when we listen with understanding . . . to see the expressed idea and attitude from the other person's point of view, to sense how it feels to him (or her) . . . , to understand his (or her) thoughts and feelings so well that you could summarize them." (Carl Rogers, cited in Teich, "Rogerian Rhetoric," 636)

Applications
dyadic rhetorical situations (contrast with triadic)
negotiation, mediation, problem solving for consensus

Applicable Rogerian Principles
person centered
mutually satisfactory solutions to problems
rational resolutions
interconnections of thought (cognition) and emotion (affect)
active listening/reading (empathy and restatement)
unconditional acceptance
*mutual understanding (empathic understanding) *key principle
collaborative meaning making
*congruence (inside ideas or feelings match outside words)
*unconditional positive regard
open dialogue
helping relationship
peers are facilitators
problem solving is part of learning
a safe learning environment (community)
respect
dialogic interaction

Writer's Tasks
Let the reader know that he or she is understood.
Support the portion of the reader's position that the writer considers valid.
Show how reader and writer share values (e.g., good will) and aspirations (desire to find mutually satisfactory solution).

Bator, Paul. "Rogerian Rhetoric." Encyclopedia of English Studies and Language Learning. Eds. Alan C. Purves, Linda Papa, and Sarah Jordan. New York: Scholastic, 1994.

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(See especially "Communication: Its Blocking and Facilitation," 329-37.)

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